

To: Mears, Mary[Mears.Mary@epa.gov]
From: Enck, Judith
Sent: Fri 4/17/2015 2:02:27 PM
Subject: Fwd: Sirenusa Response (St John VI Incident) News Clips

Hi Mary. Can u add the ap story and the Philadelphia story and any others and send me a package. Tx

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Johnson, Valencia" <Johnson.Valencia@epa.gov>
Date: April 17, 2015 at 9:29:47 AM EDT
To: R2 RRC <R2_RRC@epa.gov>
Subject: Sirenusa Response (St John VI Incident) News Clips

Liburd Calls for Ban on Methyl Bromide in Territory

St. Croix Source

By Lynda Lohr

April 16, 2015

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's investigation into the use of a pesticide containing methyl bromide to fumigate a unit at Sirenusa condominiums on St. John in March shows that the pesticide was also used in Puerto Rico, the agency said in a press release issued Thursday.

EPA spokesman Elias Rodriquez said that while the agency knows from other sources that the pesticide was used in Puerto Rico, its investigation turned up documents that indicate it may also have been improperly applied.

The Department of Planning and Natural Resources said early in the investigation that the Meth-O-Gas pesticide used by the St. Thomas-based Terminix at Sirenusa came from Puerto Rico. After the fumigation, members of a vacationing Delaware family suffered seizures and, following treatment at Roy L. Schneider Hospital on St. Thomas, all four were airlifted to mainland hospitals.

Rodriguez said that testing right after the family got sick on March 20 confirmed the presence of methyl bromide in the family's unit as well as a lower unit where the pesticide was used.

"Now they're airing them out," Rodriguez said of the units at Sirenusa.

He said after the units are ventilated, the air will be sampled again to help DPNR decide if it's safe for people to occupy the units.

Regarding the use of pesticides with methyl bromide, EPA indicated it notified the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, which has direct enforcement authority for pesticide use violations. The Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and EPA are gathering information from pesticide suppliers and applicators of methyl bromide products in Puerto Rico regarding their distribution or use of the products.

Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture, with support from EPA, has sent inspectors to pesticide applicator companies, including Terminix, which has numerous locations around the country.

Rodriguez said that on Tuesday, the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture warned pesticide companies in Puerto Rico that if they are using pesticide containing methyl bromide, it must be for approved uses in agriculture and commodities.

Methyl bromide can only be used in very limited situations, not residential use.

However, when pesticides with similar toxicity are used in residences, precautions must be used. They include evacuating the building for multiple days as well as tenting and sealing the rooms. DPNR said previously those procedures were not in place at Sirenusa.

The V.I. Health Department asked the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to come to St. John to assist with an epidemiologic investigation into these exposures. Rodriguez forwarded information indicating that, during the investigation, the agency and Health staff will identify people who might have been exposed to methyl bromide. They include residents, visitors, vacationers, employees of the condominium complex and other locations where this chemical was used, pesticide company employees and emergency responders.

The team will conduct interviews to determine exposure, symptoms and health effects, medical care received, review medical charts of those receiving medical care following the exposure and provide information about methyl bromide to local medical providers and to the people who were potentially exposed.

On Thursday, Sen. Almando "Rocky" Liburd issued a press release in which he called for an outright ban on methyl bromide in the territory.

"My preliminary research indicates that there are unlikely any approved uses for the chemical here in the territory," he said. "This is a strong and dangerous substance that only has very specific agricultural applications."

Liburd said it was very troubling to note that this pesticide has apparently been utilized throughout the territory, despite the fact that experts deemed methyl bromide too dangerous for widespread use nearly 20 years ago.

He said he worries about Sirenusa employees and other Virgin Islanders who may have unwittingly had contact with the chemical.

"There are people who may have been repeatedly exposed over the years," Liburd said.

Liburd also expressed concerns about the vacationing Delaware family.

"This is a true tragedy," he said. "I have reached out to this family by letter and by phone to let them know that we are very sorry this happened here and that there are many Virgin Islanders praying for their full recovery."

Health effects of exposure to methyl bromide are serious and include headaches, dizziness, weakness and confusion. In severe cases exposure can cause central nervous system and respiratory system damage. Pesticides can be very toxic and it is critically important that restricted use pesticides be used only as approved by EPA.

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